

GAMBLING

Gambling refers to risking something of value on an event of uncertain outcome. Legal forms of gambling available in Missouri include raffles, charitable games (i.e. bingo, pull-tabs, etc.), Missouri Lottery games, and licensed riverboat casinos. Many illegal forms of gambling are also available, including sports betting, dice and card games, Internet gambling, illegal slot machines (i.e. Cherry Master, Silver Falls, etc.), animal fighting, and underage gambling.

For most people, gambling is an enjoyable form of recreation – one that can be experienced with little or no harmful effects. For some individuals, however, gambling can be a serious problem with devastating consequences. Individuals who choose to gamble should follow the guidelines for gambling responsibly to minimize any problems that may be created by their gambling activity.

- If you choose to gamble, do it for entertainment purposes only.
- Set a dollar limit and stick to it (BEFORE you go, decide how much you can “afford” to lose).
- Set a time limit and stick to it.
- Treat the money you lose as the cost of your entertainment.
- Expect to lose – the odds are that you will lose, accept loss as part of the game.
- Make it a personal rule not to gamble on credit; do not borrow money to gamble.
- Create balance in your life – gambling should not interfere with (or substitute for) friends, family, work, or other worthwhile activities.
- Avoid “chasing” lost money.
- Never gamble as a way to cope with emotional or physical pain – gambling for reasons other than entertainment can lead to problems.
- Become educated about the warning signs of problem gambling, and the resources available.

Problem and Compulsive Gambling

Anyone who gambles can develop problems if they are not aware of (or ignore) the risks. Problem gambling includes all gambling behavior patterns that cause problems in at least one area of life – such as personal, family, social, occupational, legal, or financial. Problems with gambling range from single incidents (such as over-spending) to compulsive (pathological) gambling.

Compulsive gambling is a behavior disorder in which an individual has an uncontrollable preoccupation and urge to gamble. It is a progressive addiction characterized by increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, “chasing” losses, emotional dependence on gambling, and loss of control. The compulsive gambler gets the same effect from gambling as someone else might get from drinking alcohol, taking a tranquilizer, or taking cocaine.

The impact of a gambling addiction far exceeds the obvious financial losses incurred by the repeated gambling. For example,

- Studies indicate 25-50 percent of spouses of problem gamblers have been abused.
- Children of compulsive gamblers are often prone to suffer abuse, as well as neglect.
- Children of problem gamblers are at a higher risk of developing health threatening behaviors, including alcohol and drug abuse, problem gambling, eating disorders, depression, and suicide.

Extent of Problem

- Approximately 1 percent of adults are estimated to meet the criteria for compulsive gambling in a given year. Another 2-3 percent would be considered problem gamblers.
- Adolescent prevalence rates of problem gambling are 2-4 times that of adults. The highest rates reported are among those 18-25 years of age.
- The estimated annual cost for problem and pathological gamblers is \$5 billion per year and an additional \$40 billion in lifetime costs for productivity reductions, social service, and creditor losses.
- Each problem gambler negatively impacts 10 to 17 people around them, including family, employer, co-workers, and government.

Some of the More Common Warning Signs of a Gambling Problem

- Losing time from work or school due to gambling (or thinking about gambling)
- Becoming restless and/or irritable when trying to cut back or stop gambling
- Lying about the amount of time and/or money spent on gambling
- Gambling to escape problems (stress) or to feel better
- Gambling more money, or returning, to “get even” after losses (chasing losses)
- Neglecting the care of one’s self or family due to gambling
- Relying on others for financial assistance
- Committing or planning illegal acts to finance gambling
- Problems with job, school or relationships

A small percentage of people who gamble will develop gambling problems regardless of age, race, gender, or socio-economic status. A family history of any addiction increases an individual’s risk for developing an addiction. Although it is not possible to predict exactly who may develop a gambling problem, once identified, it can be successfully treated.

Getting Help

Compulsive gambling is a disease. Like most diseases, it can be diagnosed and treated. The first struggle to overcoming a gambling disorder is admitting there is a problem and recognizing it won’t go away without help. If you feel you or someone you know has a problem with gambling, please call 1-888-BETSOFF (1-888-238-7633) for help.

Your toll-free call to 1-888-BETSOFF can put you in touch with people—24 hours a day—who understand your situation and can refer you to free treatment facilities, self-help groups, self-exclusion services, and other resources in your area. Missouri offers free treatment to family members as well.

You can also find more information on the following Web sites:

- Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling <http://www.888betsoff.org>
- Gamblers Anonymous <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>
- Gam-Anon <http://www.gam-anon.org>
- National Council on Problem Gambling <http://www.ncpgambling.org>
- Nevada Council on Problem Gambling <http://www.nevadacouncil.org>
- Women Helping Women Recovery Newsletters <http://www.femalegamblers.org>

Sources

Missouri Constitution, Article III, Sections 39(a) through 39(f)

National Council on Problem Gambling

Nevada Council on Problem Gambling

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National Gambling Impact Study Commission Final Report (1999)

Politzer RM, Yesalis CE, Hudak CJ. 1992. The epidemiologic model and the risk of legalized gambling:

Where are we headed? *Health Values* 16:20-27



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